Father Joe’s compassionate security manager Dumas

As she patrols outside of the Joan Kroc Center, Celeste Dumas pauses on 16th Street where a pointed object lies. She swiftly pulls out a set of plastic gloves from her belt and clears the sidewalk of what could be drug paraphernalia. Later in her office, she threw the item in a bin for bio-hazardous materials.

After 10 years working in security at Father Joe’s Villages, this small act is second nature. “We look for hazards all the time. It’s really weird. I do it naturally everywhere I go — even though I’m not working,” Dumas explained. “I’ve been doing it for over a decade.”

As she has risen through the ranks at the nonprofit organization that provides services to much of San Diego’s homeless community, she has become one of the most effective operators when it comes to looking for hazards.

Cornerstone Managing Partners celebrates 20 years in San Diego

Tom Brooks is the founder and CEO of Cornerstone Managing Partners, a construction management firm whose expertise is taking on projects that leave most other companies spinning their wheels. Brooks has made high-rise residential projects his specialty, especially when it comes to the HOAs that come with the luxury units. This makes him a popular figure in Downtown San Diego given its surge in high-rise units in the last 20 years.

If something goes wrong in these towers, it can be a monumental task to fix it. And the affluent tenants do not take kindly to being displaced. This is where Brooks earns his reputation as a “fixer” of sorts to these high-value HOAs. His company has earned tens of millions of dollars as well as a stellar reputation of not only fixing problems, but also getting the key permits and approvals to do so. This is something that Brooks excels at and its origin is in his grassroots construction upbringing.

Brooks started out working with his uncle and his cousin doing entry-level house framing in Los Angeles during the ‘80s. “I started out as a stick framer, I was working up in LA, I lived in Monrovia, and my uncle and my cousin, that’s what we did, we

Gaslamp promenade plans in progress

Creating a car-free zone on Fifth Avenue could still be 3 to 5 years away

It won’t happen overnight, and there are still plenty of logistical questions, but the path toward turning a portion of the Gaslamp Quarter into a car-free, pedestrian-friendly promenade is underway.

In late 2019, representatives of the Gaslamp Quarter Association officially announced plans for the promenade project. Tentatively, the proposal calls for closing stretches of Fifth Avenue — from Broadway to L Street — as a car-free zone on Fifth Avenue could still be 3 to 5 years away.
Children’s Park wants to play

In 2018, Spurlock Landscape Architects was selected to prepare construction documents, permitting, and to perform construction observation of the park.

Spurlock Senior Associate Amelia Capron is project manager for the design team as the prime consultant, managing the completion of construction documents, permitting for the drawings, and coordination between the contractors and design team through construction.

“The new park programming is a true reflection of the neighborhood’s desires,” she said, “It will now be able to serve its community, activating the space again and creating a true asset.”

The renovation effort, which is expected to be finished in the summer of 2021, will add family-friendly amenities intended to activate the entire space.

New amenities include space for a future retail vendor, dog run, large and unique children’s play area, fitness equipment, a flexible-use lawn surrounding the Civic Pond, picnic areas, game tables for chess, ping pong and cornhole.

A public restroom will be open 24 hours with an attendant who will be able to have eyes on the park. People will be buzzed in and out of the restroom by the attendant to reduce issues that have occurred in other Downtown public restrooms.

There will also be an off-leash dog park with an artificial turf called “K9 Grass” by ForeverLawn, specifically created for wear and tear by dogs, and featuring a routine cleaning regimen.

The children’s playscape includes a series of large custom play structures not found elsewhere in Southern California to create a destination playground. This equipment is primarily constructed of wooden components and includes a custom three-level tower structure with slides, wooden climbers, and equipment for

SEE CHILDREN’S PARK, Page 4

Read full article here.
Christopher Lander is the founder of BASIS, a Downtown San Diego based incubator that has recently launched four separate e-commerce brands. His mission is to disrupt the dental, hair, and skin care industries with his new brands, and so far his plan is pan- ning out. These direct-to-consum- er brands include: TryAutoBrush.com, IvyLeafSkincare.com, ShopTheNailed.com, and ShopTheCore.com — and they're all owned and operated by BASIS. Lander and his team have reached the one-year anniversary landmark, and are looking forward to many more successful years here in San Diego. His office is located on the fifth floor of the San Diego Union Tribune building on B Street, where his team members work on their laptops while lounging on beanbag chairs. The laid- back environment is typical of many of today’s young startup companies, but the company has had to overcome a few ma- jor hurdles to get to the one-year anniversary intact. This includes a merger with a separate compa- ny called Ads, Inc., which was marred by the sudden death of its founder Asher Burke in a highly publicized helicopter crash in Kenya in March. “Obviously, that was just a cra- zy time for us, and I had to decide whether to keep it all together and run both sides of the busi- ness,” Lander said. “I eventually decided to separate the businesses and that’s where BASIS stands today.” At the time of the merger, Lander and Burke sought out and hired leaders in the field of e-com- merce in various different fields. But after Burke’s death, a lot of the cash flow that was to come along with the merger was lost. As a re- sult, there was a round of layoffs, and the ones who survived were suddenly forced to take on additional responsibilities that were not necessarily in their comfort zone. But the wealth of experience that the new hires brought with them made this transition successful and resulted in the four brands currently owned by BASIS. The most popular brand is AutoBrush, “the unique electric toothbrush of the 21st century.” This product fits in your mouth like an athletic mouth guard, and the AutoBrush for Kids model is a hot seller. For the merger, Lander and Burke’s goal was to snatch up all the e-commerce marketing stars and create a superpower that would dominate the field. This included running the whole show as opposed to marketing for other people. And Lander in- tends to hold true to that plan no matter what fate throws at him. “The back story is that we are good marketers, we are able to sell things online profitably. So, we wanted to be able to build as- sets instead of marketing for other people,” Lander said. Nikki Johnson is the director of brand development at BASIS, and one of the people Lander brought on board for the merger. Johnson is excited about the suc- cess that the AutoBrush for Kids has enjoyed. “The whole idea is to change the way people look at health and beauty products, and make a dent in the health and beauty space,” Johnson noted. “It’s actually making kids enjoy brushing their teeth, so all of the parents are saying their kids are using it eight times a day be- cause it plays jungle music and the kids are actually having little dance parties. And they’re actu- ally excited to brush their teeth now, which is exciting for us be- cause you just want to build the good habit of kids getting used to brushing their teeth and not mak- ing it such a negative thing for them. Kohl’s and CVS and Target have all reached out to us because of seeing us out there and what kind of difference we’re trying to make in the oral health care space for kids.” As for the future, Lander wants his company to collectively catch its breath after the drama earlier in the year. But he also wants to springboard onto bigger things once that is done. “I want to stabilize and then grow version four of AutoBrush,” Lander said. “Then I’d like to expand outside of the United States, wherever that takes us.” —Vince Meehan can be reached at vinnie@meehan.com.
Sparks has a Hart

By DIANA CAVAGNARO

Sparks Gallery is located in the heart of the Gaslamp between Island and Market on Sixth Avenue. This historic space was originally called the Sterling Hardware Building and was built in 1924. This 1920s period design has original maple floorboards and brick walls that were restored by hand, creating an amazing 4,500-square-foot space. There is also a mezzanine level, exterior patio, and a fully equipped kitchen. This gallery was designed for contemporary artwork. All of the artists live in San Diego or Southern California.

Sonya Sparks is the owner and chief curator of this luxurious gallery, which opened in 2013. Sparks collects talent with high impact and gives the public high-quality pieces of art with reasonable prices. In 2015, the gallery was awarded the People’s in Preservation Award for Adaptive Reuse by Save Our Heritage Organisation (SOHO). This month, the Gaslamp Quarter Association presented them with an award for the Best Gallery at the San Diego Union-Tribune’s 25th Anniversary Gaslamp Gala presented by the Hilton San Diego Gaslamp Quarter.

The Sparks Gallery hosts eight unique jewelers, who create amazing wearable art. I had the opportunity to interview Alexandra Hart about her couture jewelry featured there. Hart is inspired by natural symbiotic relationships with inanimate objects. In fact, she named the recent solo show she had at Sparks Gallery “Symbiosis.” The concept behind her art is a combination of abstract ideas with traditional jewelry. Influenced by biology and plants, you will see some jewelry with petals and others have feathers. The exhibition had walls with sketches of human form renderings and then the jewelry was placed so that it looked like a necklace was around the neck or a bracelet around the wrist of the figure. There also were live mannequins walking around and interacting with the guests creating a nontraditional event.

Hart began her business in 1995 and earned both bachelor’s and master’s degrees in Art and Metalsmithing. She has fashion experience designing for Karl Lagerfeld and Givenchy fashion jewelry. Working as a metalsmith, she uses gold silver, platinum and copper. Her goal is to promote responsible sources of materials using ethical metalsmithing and fair trade gems.

A sampling of the names she uses for her pieces inspired by nature are the feather wrap cuff bracelet, petal earring and necklace, quill earrings and rings, the Venus flytrap earrings and sea anemone. I especially like the filoblume necklace. (Courtesy photo)

Created for Alexandra’s solo exhibition, “Symbiosis” (Photo by Raymond Elstad)

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The disturbing tale of 101 Ash Street

BARBARA BRY | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Mayor Faulconer’s five-year financial outlook projects four straight years of city budget deficits, despite one of the strongest economies in years. Why are the streets, sidewalks, parks and other city facilities continuing to deteriorate when San Diego’s economy is booming? Unfortunately, it’s difficult for San Diegans to get a straight answer to that question because our current city administration lacks transparency and accountability.

But on Friday, Jan. 17, when city administration announced the city-purchased former Sempora Energy headquarters at 101 Ash St. must be vacated, again, we got a look behind the curtain. And what was revealed is a shocking example of mismanagement and lack of accountability plaguing our city.

The lack of oversight and accountability at 101 Ash St. is reflective of bigger problems at City Hall. Although my predecessors on the City Council and I have been outspoken in opposing the mayor’s office — approved this lease-purchase agreement, no one has yet accepted responsibility for this fiasco. I have asked the city auditor to investigate the process by which the building was purchased, the due diligence that was conducted on both the value and the physical condition, and the subsequent handling of the management of this project and the overall expenditures on the project.

The city’s chief operating officer claimed on June 17, 2019, that “the project remains on schedule and within budget.” In August 2019, county regulators shut down renovations at 101 Ash St. due to asbestos violations. After “remediating” the violations, the building was subsequently occupied by city employees until Jan. 17, when once again, 101 Ash St. was deemed unfit for human occupation. 101 Ash St. is neither on-time, on-budget nor safe for occupants. We need a city administration that is accountable for the management of our tax dollars. How much tax revenue has been wasted and who is responsible? These issues matter because while $18,000 per day is being spent just on lease payments, that revenue could be used to fix our roads, sidewalks and parks.

We must demand more of city officials. We must demand leaders who have the skills and knowledge to successfully manage our city’s budget and administration.

I continue to demand the city auditor provide the following information:

• Why did the City and city attorney approve a lease-purchase agreement that effectively relieves the sellers of any responsibility for undiscovered defects in the building?

• What due diligence occurred prior to consummating the lease-purchase agreement regarding valuation and the physical condition of 101 Ash St.?

• What is the total cost to date to relocate staff and from Ash Street, including temporary quarters?

• What are the details on all budget items, including increases?

• What is the economic impact of the suspension of Development Services Department services for the duration of the move and from this date until services are fully restored?

• What measures have been put in place to stop this fiasco from happening again?

It is a simple equation: When we elect officials who lack financial and management expertise and allow the city administration to be unaccountable, we expose the city and its residents to financial risk. That risk threatens the safety and welfare of our neighborhoods. We must demand better.

— Barbara Bry represents District 1 on the City Council. She is also a candidate for San Diego Mayor.

Fifth Avenue

— to vehicular traffic and adding a number of new features, including public art and street furniture.

While the announcement officially bubbled to the surface last fall, Michael Trimble, executive director of the Gaslamp Quarter Association, said there had been talk of making changes to the layout of one of San Diego’s most visible neighborhoods.

“As a concept, it’s actually been kicked around for decades,” Trimble said in a recent interview with Downtown News. “Obviously this is a large project, and a very expensive project.”

Cost, actually, will be one of the sticking points. The transformation has been pegged at approximately $40 million, based on all of the plan components. Trimble and others involved with the preliminary planning have cited four possible funding sources: state and federal grants, corporate donations and private investment.

“There are complications. It’s not an easy task,” Trimble said of the various pieces of the puzzle that will need to come together for the project to see the light of day. “Working out the details will take time.”

The Gaslamp Quarter plans have drawn comparisons to other well-known sites with similar amenities, including the Third Street Promenade in Santa Monica. Trimble said several factors contributed to the formal unveiling of the plans at this point.

“Gaslamp is at a turning point right now,” Trimble said. “This is the front door to the city, and it gives visitors a first impression.”

With other well-established San Diego neighborhoods making tweaks, Trimble said the promenade also is a logical next step in giving Gaslamp Quarter a distinctive edge in the greater cityscape.

“There’s just a lot of options for people these days,” he said. “We want this to be a place where people can meet and enjoy life.”

Based on current estimates, Trimble said the actual groundbreaking of the targeted area of Fifth Avenue could still be three to five years off on the horizon.

In the meantime, the Gaslamp Quarter Association, which is helming the planning process, is working to gather feedback from Downtown residents, business owners and other people interested in weighing in on the project.

Since the project’s initial announcement, the association has been taking comments through an online form that can be accessed at gaslamp.org/promenade.

By his estimates, Trimble said the comments funneled into his office through the form have been “overwhelmingly positive,” with about 97% of respondents saying they favor the promenade plans.

The next step in the association’s formal feedback process is an informational meeting, set for 5 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 11, at the Hilton San Diego Gaslamp Quarter Hotel, 401 K St.

While there is still a bounty of questions at this early stage, Trimble said he is encouraged by the broad-level support from representatives of other closely aligned organizations, in addition to local election officials.

“Activating the Gaslamp and investing in a pedestrian-focused promenade will enhance the experience of visitors and provide exciting opportunities for people to gather,” City Council member Chris Ward said in a statement. His 3rd District representation on the City Council includes Gaslamp Quarter.

Joe Terzi, president and CEO of the San Diego Tourism Authority, also has gone on record in support of the plans.

“It will create a sense of community, and a place for social connections and entertainment,” Terzi said in a statement. “Its completion will represent a vital renaissance for the city — one that will serve the community as a place to gather and celebrate life in America’s Finest City.”

— Dave Fillin is a freelance journalist with a special affinity for San Diego and its people. Contact him at dave.fillin@thinkpost.net.
That’s amore! Celebrate a romantic Valentine’s Day in Little Italy

By CHRISTOPHER GOMEZ

Make Valentine’s Day weekend extra special this year with a romantic getaway to San Diego’s Little Italy. Lovebirds everywhere are called to this popular Downtown neighborhood to enjoy a list of endless activities. Filled with award-winning restaurants, unique shops, and fine hotels, the 48-square-block neighborhood has everything you need to make this weekend special for you and your loved one.

If you’re still on search for the perfect Valentine’s gift, Little Italy has one-of-a-kind shops to spoil your significant other. Search for small apothecary items and gifts at Love & Aesthetics or find a unique home decor while antique shopping at India Street Antiques.

Take an afternoon stroll through the charming neighborhood and hit up a variety of bars and wineries. Swing by for a tasting at Pali Wine Co. Winery Tasting Room to sip on some of the best pinot noir and chardonnay from the central coast or Carruth Cellars Wine Garden, an urban winery offering premium wines from Northern and Central California. Before dinner reservations, stop by the European-styled Piazza della Famiglia to watch the sun set against gorgeous views of the San Diego Bay. Enjoy handmade gelato at Boboli Natural Gelato. For those looking to turn Valentine’s Day up a notch, enjoy a night out on the town at hot spots like Craft & Commerce’s speakeasy False Idol, San Diego’s oldest tavern Waterfront Bar & Grill or Born & Raised’s 1920s-style rooftop.

To explore all of the romance the neighborhood has to offer, surprise your significant other with a weekend staycation. Carte Hotel, Little Italy’s newest hotel, is near the Embarcadero waterfront, which is perfect for starry evening walks and offers stunning views from its rooftop pool and bar. Porto Vista Hotel is just steps away from all of the excitement of the neighborhood and is offering a special cupid’s deal including a complimentary Champagne bottle.

From Valentine’s Day preparations to romantic celebrations, Little Italy is the place for a memorable Valentine’s Day weekend that will wow your beloved.

—Christopher Gomez has been Little Italy’s district manager since 2000. Reach him at chris@littleitalysd.com. To stay connected with Little Italy, check out what’s going on in the neighborhood by following on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook. For more information, visit LittleItalySD.com.

Forget an American in Paris. How about a Neapolitan’s adventures in San Diego?

LITTLE ITALY

By TOM CESARINI

When you don’t see Neapolitan tenor and Little Italy favorite Rosario Monetti belting out a favorite aria in awe-inspiring programs and venues locally and globally, you can find him overseeing his newest venture — Mesquiggah Shack in Mission Hills — serving up a great cup of coffee, and often with a tune at no additional charge. You can also see Rosario perform in Little Italy at Amici House in the coming months where he assembles unforgettable shows. We sat down with Rosario to ask him about his latest endeavor.

WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO THIS NEW VENTURE?

It was by chance. A friend told me about the coffee kiosk on sale, and the funny thing is that we always talked about this little place and how much we loved it. Everything started from the previous owner who, about 10 years ago, turned a bank ATM into a coffee kiosk — yes, it was an ATM before. The quirkiness is basically the creativity of the old owner but even more the contribution over the years of the loyal customers — each of them has put in a bit of his own vision of the place.

AS AN ITALIAN ENTREPRENEUR IN SAN DIEGO, WHAT HAVE YOU NOTICED ABOUT DIFFERENCES IN BUSINESS (AND LIFESTYLE)

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WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO NEW ENTREPRENEURS COMING HERE?

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PRACTICES BETWEEN ITALY AND THE U.S.?

The main difference from a business point of view is the easier approach to bureaucracy here, from the very beginning to the final step for the business to be active and alive. In Italy, the bureaucracy is a nightmare, which pushes away many entrepreneurs from my native country. The lifestyle also is very different — everything in Italy is delayed — breakfast at 8 a.m., lunch at 1:30 p.m., and dinner at 8:30 p.m. And, of course, the nightlife as well — and I mean daily nightlife — you go out at 11 p.m. over there, and here at 11 p.m. you are already in your dreams, sleeping.

PRINCE DIETZ • CULTURE & HERITAGE

San Diego Downtown News February 2020
In the ongoing revitalization of Seaport Village, the Port of San Diego recently announced several incoming culinary concepts. They include a still-unnamed restaurant by television chef Sam Zien (a.k.a. Sam the Cooking Guy), and a convenience store called Seaport Market, which will sell beer, wine and prepared salads and sandwiches. Both are slated to open this summer. Zien’s full-service restaurant will feature a courtyard for cooking demonstrations, wine tastings and musical entertainment. It will operate in partnership with Grain & Grit Collective, which runs Carnitas Snack Shack and the Little Italy Food Hall. The latter is home to Zien’s Not Not Tacos stall.

More than 50 craft and boutique beers are on tap at the new Ale Tales Taproom in the East Village. The spacious bottle shop has two other locations, one at 2569 Linda Vista Road, and the other in Albany, CA. Here, it shares space with Bread & Cheese Eatery, which sells soups, salads and gourmet grilled cheese sandwiches. And the beer selection extends to cans and bottles as well. 1520 J St., 619-786-2537, aletalestaproom.com.

In an effort to reignite the dining experience at the Glass Door, which offers views of the bay and skyline from the fourth floor of Little Italy’s Porto Vista Hotel, a new breakfast and dinner menu has just rolled out. The menus were created by food and beverage director Josh Weast, who arrived several months ago from the Silverado Resort and Country Club in Napa Valley.

Since opening in 2008, the restaurant’s momentum has fluctuated with a fleeting roster of chefs. The Los Angeles-based Mendocino Farms salad and sandwich shop opens Feb. 13 in the Gaslamp Quarter. With 32 locations in California and Texas, its downtown debut marks the company’s fourth outlet within San Diego County.

The fast-casual eatery offers a chef-driven menu featuring playful takes on Cobb, taco and Chinese chicken salads, as well as hearty tuna melts, turkey clubs, vegan burgers and more. Totaling 2,700 square feet, the restaurant will fill the lower level of Tower 180 and feature live greenery, floor-to-ceiling windows and a raised patio. 1010 Second Ave., mendocinofarms.com.

Salmon with carrot puree and seasonal veggies at the Glass Door (Courtesy of Olive Creative Strategies)

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‘Sam the Cooking Guy’ has a downtown restaurant in the works. (H2 Public Relations)

Other food-and-beverage vendors due in 2020 are Mr. Moto Pizza, Spill the Beans, Mike Hess Brewery and San Pasqual Wine Tasting Room. 849 W. Harbor Drive, seaportvillage.com.

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French fare sans the heaviness

Restaurant Review

By FRANK SABATINI JR.

I’m always interested to learn where restaurants source their breads from, given the range of reputable wholesale bakeries sprinkled across our region. Though until lunching at Zinqué recently, I had never encountered a San Diego kitchen that receives loaves directly from France.

For the tartines, which are open-face sandwiches topped with various proteins and spreads, the bread hails from Poilane Bakery in Paris. The long-established business is famous for its slow-fermentation technique using natural sourdough leaven. It arrives baked, packaged and ready for consumption.

What you get are dense, rustic slices of goodness, which paired swimmingly to our tartine of choice — one that’s topped simply with butter, salami and cornichons. Other options include tuna nicoise, tomato-avocado, and smoked salmon with crème fraiche, egg and fresh dill.

From yet a different bakery in France is where the croissant dough originates. The buttery, flakey beauties are baked onsite and serve as vessels for chocolate or prosciutto with Gruyère cheese. They’re available on the breakfast-brunch menu.

As a twosome focused on lunch, we dove straight into an order of sandwiches and tartines, $6 to $12.

The ‘le bowl’ with veggies and egg-white frittata over brown rice (Photo by Frank Sabatini Jr.)

The ‘le bowl’ is where France meets wellness-minded Southern California. Brown rice serves as the bed for arugula, avocado and shavings of nutty-tasting Comte cheese. It features a choice of chicken or egg-white frittata. We chose the latter, which harbored the salt given to the dish.

My favorite sandwich in the world (aside from a hefty Reuben) is France’s signature croque-monsieur — or “madame” if choosing a sunny-side egg on top. Zinqué offers both, using bread in this case from a Los Angeles bakery.

I ordered the madame, which contained the obligatory layer of ham inside, as well as the right measure of bechamel sauce. The egg was perfectly cooked, although the amount of toasted Gruyère on top fell short. Perhaps it is in keeping with the menu’s lighter, healthier approach. But ideally the cheese should encase the entire sandwich, and the consumer should suck up the guilt.

The croque madame (Photo by Frank Sabatini Jr.)

Other lunch items include steak frites with chimichurri or peppercorn sauce; mussels in white wine and herbs with frites; smoked salmon carpaccio; zucchini quiche, and the unexpected findings of prawn and pork belly tacos.

The dinner menu features many of the same items, with the additions of a charcuterie plate, assorted flatbreads and ratatouille.

Cocktails, and French wines and bubbly are in abundance from a full bar sitting at the center of a modern-industrial layout that opens to the street.

Zinqué operates daily starting at 7 a.m. It closes at midnight Sunday through Thursday, and at 2 a.m. Fridays and Saturdays. It also offers happy hour from 4 to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday, when select drinks and small bites are discounted.

—Frank Sabatini Jr. is the author of ‘Secret San Diego’ (ECW Press) and began his local writing career for the former San Diego Tribune. You can reach him at fsabatini@san.rr.com.
CURTAIN GOING UP!

SANDIE WALSH | Features Staff

With pomp and circumstance, the magnificent Balboa Theatre opened on Friday, March 28, 1924. All of San Diego was excited to welcome screen stars Corinne Griffith, Conway Tearle, Adele Marco, a popular brother and sister vaudeville duo and their revue, the "Musical Melange." The theater could accommodate films and live acts, both human and animal. Opening night was a huge success! Perhaps more noteworthy was that this elaborate and visually stunning building was produced by an all San Diego team. San Diego architect William Wheeler designed the building for the owner, Robert E. Hicks, a former newspaperman from Colorado, who moved to San Diego in 1913. Wheeler was especially pleased to work on this project, as he was a former actor and vaudeville performer, and would ultimately perform at the Balboa on occasion.

The general contractor was the Wurster Construction Company and Mr. J. Campbell did the sculpturing and modeling. Other San Diego sub-contractors were: the Pioneer Truck Company, excavating; Spreckels Brothers, portland cement; John Hanson, rock and sand; W.C. Merritt, plumbing; J. O'Neill, brick contractor; Benton Roof and Roofing, roofing and paint; Ed Thayer, plastering contractor; and W.J. Baily, plasterer.

Additionally, other San Diegans involved were National Iron Works, San Diego Tile and Woodstone Company, Southern Electric Company and the Austin Safe and Desk Company, which provided the theater seating.

The theater opened to the theater with 34 offices and six stores. It was primarily designed as a movie house, but it also had complete facilities for live stage performances. When the venue opened, it had a Robert Morton 4-32 pipe organ. In 1928, the organ was moved to the Fox Theatre. The cost of the building was $800,000 and was dubbed by the press as "a gem of a theater."

Beginning with the entrance, this steel and concrete structure was a marvel of exquisite detail. Originally, there were two box offices, one on either side of the doorway. The entrance floor featured a tile mosaic commemorating Balboa's discovery of the Pacific Ocean, and the walls were covered with elaborate maps of the Americas. The acoustics were unusual and seemed to provide modern stereophonic sound. As there were air registers to carry the backstage organ sound to various points all over the theater, the side walls close to the stage were ornamental waterfalls cascading over artificial rocks, which provided a cooling effect as well as an interesting sight and sound display.

Up a ramp from the foyer, patrons could retreat to a "pleasure." This was a special feature of the theater, which provided comfortable davenports and chairs and soft music from the wall grills. Led into the auditorium by ushers in Spanish-themed toreador costumes, guests could be seated on one of 904 leather cushioned opera seats, placed 36 inches apart. The ambience was further enhanced by reflective upward lighting, used both internally and externally, in four colors or any blend of the four. Rich tapestries covered the walls, and a large orchestra pit accommodating musicians associated with vaudeville and silent films was at the front of the stage. The 42-foot-wide and 28-foot-deep stage included a special opening for a 1,200-pound elephant used to transport equipment from the basement or for special effects. Underneath the stage were lounges for musicians, which could be entered from the orchestra pit, dressing rooms for the performers, as well as spaces for carpenters, electricians, and stagehands. A 72-foot loft towered over the beautiful maple stage and was spacious enough to accommodate 29-line sets, which could be used for curtains, scenery or scenery. The stage itself was well reinforced to provide for the weight of various animal acts that played. One, in particular, gained special recognition. It was a circus act which boasted an educated monkey, a singing mule, performing monkeys and a trick elephant who danced the ballet. The trick was on the audience though, as the elephant was not given time to relieve itself before the act, and did so onstage, spraying not only the entire orchestra pit, but also the performers, as they were unprepared. The theater had to pay a very large cleaning bill! There were no further animal acts.

HISTORY

The Balboa Theatre still has live shows today. (Photo by Tom Newshak)

The exterior was no less theoretically detailed. The building is crowned by a polychrome tiled tower, which echoes the Spanish influence seen on the nearby Santa Fe depot dome tower and the fountain in Horton Plaza park. Various businesses occupied the storefronts over the years and included restaurateurs, confectioners, tailors, jewelers, photographers, beauty salons, and later, tattoo parlors. In 1927, the KFBC broadcasting station operated from the roof of the building. The Fox West Coast Theatres Inc. art department occupied the fifth floor from 1931-34, and in 1943, half of the office rooms were converted to hotel rooms to accommodate the influx of WWII servicemen arriving in San Diego. These lodgings of dubious integrity operated until 1965.

In 1930, the Balboa became a deluxe Spanish-language theater. The following year, local Spanish teachers made arrangements to bring in groups of Spanish students at reduced rates. Balboa Theatre advertisements included the phrase, “Learn Spanish while being entertained.” However, by 1952 the Great Depression put a stop to the reduced rates, and the Balboa returned to screening Hollywood films.

The theater continued to operate until 1965, when it was acquired by the Center City Development Corporation, who intended to incorporate it into the Horton Plaza Redevelopment Plan. In 1986, the late Tony Michetti formed the Balboa Theatre Foundation, a nonprofit, which negotiated with the city to renovate and reuse the theater for live performance once more. With a $26.5 million restoration, the Balboa reopened for its inaugural season in 2008. It once again hosts international live entertainment of the highest caliber.

Sander Willhite is the historian for the Gaslamp Quarter Historical Foundation. She can be reached at swillhite@gaslampfoundation.org.

San Diego architect William Wheeler was especially pleased to work on this project, as he was a former actor and vaudeville performer, and would ultimately perform at the Balboa on occasion.
Utility box art provides glimpse into history of the Gaslamp Quarter

On the southwest corner of Fifth and G streets in the bustling heart of the Gaslamp Quarter, is a small piece of history.

It’s a utility box, just one among a few in a recently completed project in the Gaslamp Quarter called “Gaslamp Did You Know?”

While the utility box itself isn’t particularly old, its modern wrapped façade chronicles a bit of the intersection’s history from nearly 150 years ago.

In 2019, diners move in and out of the building, ready for a night out in Downtown’s famous entertainment district. In 1874, occupying that corner of the block was a bank. And over the next couple decades, it would house the city library, the police department, and the mayor.

“Gaslamp Did You Know?” is part of an ongoing effort by the Downtown San Diego Partnership to enhance the pedestrian experience in our urban core through visual storytelling.

“Our Clean and Safe program engages the public and entices them to learn more by visiting the Gaslamp Quarter Historical Foundation and taking a guided walking tour.”

Using images from the San Diego History Center, so far, five boxes along Broadway and Market Street have received this retro makeover, with another batch slated for installation in 2020 on Fourth and Sixth avenues.

In addition to the box on Fifth and G, casual passersby and curious lay historians can discover Wyatt Earp, a gambling hall operator and prospector from the 19th century, on Fifth and E. They can also get a glimpse of how the streets they tread and the buildings they encounter have changed over the years.

“This project not only helps tell the story of the Gaslamp Quarter’s remarkable history, but also enhances the pedestrian experience for those who visit our thriving entertainment district throughout the year.”

Lana Harrison was the communications coordinator for the Downtown San Diego Partnership.

Utility box art provides glimpse into history of the Gaslamp Quarter

A photo of Wyatt Earp in the Gaslamp Quarter on a utility box

The Yuma Building’s history told on a utility box

A utility box with a picture of City Hall

Gaslamp Did You Know? is a few in a recently completed project that highlights the architecture and people that helped make modern day San Diego, with colors and themes that reflect the Downtown vibe.

“The Gaslamp Quarter Association (GQA), Gaslamp Quarter Historical Foundation (GQHF), and a local design studio with an office in the community, A7D Creative Group, have partnered on this innovative project that highlights the architecture and people that helped make modern day San Diego,” said Rhiannon Lanna, executive director of the GQHF.

“The historic images wrapped onto the utility boxes are a great way to engage the public and entice them to learn more by visiting the Gaslamp Quarter Historical Foundation and taking a guided walking tour.”

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were stick framers.” Brooks said from the library of the Harbor Club in Downtown San Diego. “And we followed the 210 free-way out east as it was being built, and it was just all tract homes, and we were rough-framing the houses one a day; sometimes one and a half with the larger homes.”

Brooks continued to gain more construction expertise until he hurt himself due to the nature of the trade. The injury led to a series of events resulting in his success here in San Diego. “I hurt my back so I got out of that for a while and soon found myself in San Diego. I spent a day in the La Jolla Cove and I came out of the water going, ‘Why doesn’t everybody want to live here?’ Back then, there weren’t the seals, you could swim out around, you could jump off the rocks, this was the late ’80s and oh man, I was in love! I came out of the water and was dating a girl at the time — who became my first wife — and I told her, I don’t care what we have to do but I’m moving here.”

Within a year, he found a way to move to San Diego for good. He migrated back into construction by installing cabinetry in kitchens, baths and remodels. At his church, he met a lot of contractors divided into two groups: residential contractors and commercial contractors.

He said the residential contractors always looked at the commercial guys as having it easy. They were making more money in less time than he was in doing remodels. “I started begging for a job at one of the commercial contractors in town and for three years I hanged on their door and asked for a job. And they finally hired me.”

“In those early years, I did mostly sales and marketing where I raised the amount of money being made for the company from $15 million a year to $50 million. But when the market crash came, it was no longer about sales and marketing, it was about relationships. You could drag in plans all day long, but if you couldn’t hit the numbers, you were in trouble. I pretty much got my notice. They said, ‘You’re not producing.’ So, I went OK, take me off payroll, take me off of overhead, put me on the jobs and I’ll figure it out. That’s when I started bidding my own jobs.”

This led to his most successful DIY model of just getting things done on his own and eventually inspired him to create his own company. “When I was a residential guy doing kitchen and baths and homes and remodeling, I drew my own plans, I pulled my own permits. I wasn’t an architect, but back then you could do that as an owner, builder, and designer. I’m used to drawing my own plans, I had my light table, I had my little blueprint machines and I absolutely loved it. But I couldn’t make any money drawing plans, so I had to build. And so that’s what I did! I rebirthed my skill set and went back to my roots and started that process. I left that company after nine years and started Cornerstone. I really didn’t want to actually be a contractor, I really wanted to be a developer. But a couple of clients called up and said, ‘You know, we got a building we want you to build’ [and] the rest is history.

In 2007, we turned more to construction management and we specialize in HOA high-rise luxury now. Cornerstone now serves as a construction management firm as well as commercial construction and litigation consulting. They specialize in outside of the box projects including decommissioning a heliport atop the Harbor Club residential tower Downtown and designing a rocket-testing facility for SpaceDev/Sierra Nevada Corporation near Lakeside that came with its own unique permitting and logistical issues. Also he oversaw a project at The Grand North, where an entire tower needed to be repped without displacing the residents, and another at Diamond Terrace that suffered major flooding damage.

Through it all, Brooks has relied on his instinctual skills to solve problems that others cannot. He never earned a degree; instead he tapped into a gift for problem solving that comes naturally. “I’m a builder! I mean, I can frame it. I can hang it. When I close my eyes, when I look at a building, I can close my eyes and I can see the systems.”

Brooks said his most interesting project to date was his work for SpaceDev/Sierra Nevada Corporation. The company needed a rocket-testing site to develop a unique engine for Richard Branson and his Virgin Galactic spacecraft. This engine needed to be able to fire, then shut off, then fire and shut off again. This is not how normal rocket engines work, usually you fire them off and that’s it. Brooks found a plot of land in Slaughterhouse Canyon off Highway 67 near Lakeside. The owners had created a box canyon from past mining that served as a perfect test bed for the rocket.

Brooks’ plan was to bore a tunnel into one of the canyon walls and back the rocket engine up to it. Then they would fire the rocket engine into the tunnel during testing. The tunnel curved upward and opened above the canyon so the exhaust plume would exit southward. This proved successful and SpaceDev/Sierra Nevada Corporation won the contract, but the part that amazed Brooks the most was how he got all the city, county and state agencies to sign off on the concept in one meeting. That is the form of Tom Brooks and indicative of why he has so much respect as the go-to guy in the construction business here in San Diego. “That... was insane!” added Brooks with a grin.

Founder and CEO of Cornerstone Managing Partners, Tom Brooks, atop the Harbor Club at the site of the former heliport. (Photo by Vince Meehan)

Sierra Nevada Corporation near Lakeside that came with its own unique permitting and logistical issues. He said they also oversaw a project at The Grand North, where an entire tower needed to be repped without displacing the residents, and another at Diamond Terrace that suffered major flooding damage.

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—Vince Meehan can be reached at vinniemeehan@gmail.com.
The Maritime Museum's combination ticket offering 20% off best available rates for Valentine’s Day, along with rose petal evening turn-down service, a sunset Champagne toast for two at Above Ash Social and a fixed dinner for two at Watercolors, priced at $100 (excluding taxes and gratuities).

Sunday, Feb. 16
3-D Plankton Theater Visitors are invited to put on plankton 3-D glasses and be wowed by an underwater world where the microscopic is magnified to three-dimensional glory — captured by Scripps Institution of Oceanography scientist Jules Jaffe. Each video is about 1-3 minutes long, and the series of short videos will be viewable on loop daily at Seaport Village. Feb. 16-21.

Climate Clash The Climate Clash, a sea creature-costumed professional wrestling match, takes place live at Seaport Village at 2:30 p.m. Free to attend, the Climate Clash gives voice to the creatures and ecosystems threatened by climate change, pitting creatures against some of the things that are endangering them. Come watch the 660-pound giant Humboldt squid take on a school of local fish, or a “climate denier” versus a melting glacier. All matches will take place in the Lightouse District, where a professional wrestling ring will be erected with plenty of seating for audiences.

Saturday, Feb. 22
Commedia Italian Style San Diego Italian Film Festival and Italian Cultural Center present a lecture on Pietro Germi, his comedies, and Italy in the 1960s. The lecture will be taught by Antonio Iannotta, Ph.D., assistant director of SDIFF and professor of Italian at USD. Given that Italy is celebrating Carnival at this time, we will offer special Carnevale Sweets (frappe and castagnole) by Marco Blasi Chef Catering. 2-3:30 p.m. at Lower Hall, Our Lady of the Rosary (1654 State St.). Tickets are $30.

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Saturday, Feb. 22
The Big Easy Bites and Booze Tour Can’t make it to New Orleans for Mardi Gras this year? No problem, the Gaslamp Quarter is making its way back on Saturday, Feb. 22, from 1-5 p.m. to bring you the decadent revelry this holiday is all about. Grab your crew and get the full Mardi experience with an edible twist this year with this tantalizing self-guided tour filled with 20 delicious bites and 20 New Orleans-inspired sips. Tickets start at $25.

Sunday, Feb. 16
Meet the Winemaker Baja Wine + Food brings a unique opportunity to taste Vale de Guadalupe wines while learning about the wines directly from their makers, while enjoying the stunning San Diego skyline from IDEA1 Rooftop Lounge. The rooftop wine experience is accompanied with Baja cheeses and beautifully-styled charcuterie boards by Al ‘Fre si Chef Catering. 2-3:30 p.m. $15. At 818 Sixth Ave. Tickets are $35.

Friday, Feb. 14
At Saffron + Sage The holistic health club in Little Italy is celebrating Valentine’s Day with two specials, offering special services to indulgent couples and to those who want a little self-love. They are offering couples massages ($300) as well as facials ($150).

Alexandra Savior at Soda Bar Alexandra Savior is in San Diego with her sophomore album, “The Arches.” Alexandra’s voice and lyrics are eerie and seductive, creating a melancholy, nostalgic soundscape. Backed by Western guitar riffs, swelling strings and atmospheric percussion, the album oozes noir moodiness while maintaining an elegant charm. $12. Show starts at 9 p.m.

Friday, Feb. 21
Hope and Humor Comedy Tour Comedian Kristina Kuzman will be in San Diego at American Comedy Co. for her book/comedy tour after the release of her new book “Hold On, But Don’t Hold Still.” At 7 p.m. $15. At 818 Sixth Ave. Tickets are $35.

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Dumas noticed a hazardous item on the sidewalk and stopped to dispose of it safely.

Dumas carries a bright blue lanyard, which tells fellow staff members she has worked at Father Joe’s for 20 years. She is looking forward to getting a new lanyard when she celebrates her 15-year work anniversary.

Neapolitan’s
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

What works in our own country, no matter how effective it is and how good we are over there, can be a failure over here. Long story short — whoever comes here for the first time and wants to be an entrepreneur has to put his native cultural ego on the side and be willing to accept the cultural differences of this place and be willing and happy to work with it; compromise and meld in with it; without, of course, losing his own authenticity and flavor.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR PASSION AND SINGING CAREER.

Rosario Monetti enjoying some relaxation at his newest hangout, (Photo courtesy of Rosario Monetti) to sing classical and opera, and here I am as an opera singer now.

I am working on organizing a beautiful concert with a 25-piece orchestra with the collaboration of an acclaimed orchestra director and music arranger who has arranged and directed the music for Andrea Bocelli and many other famous Italian singers. I am also going to Sicily for a week as a guest singer for an archeological and wine tour, and there are other projects that I will tell about and promote very soon.

WHAT DO YOU WANT PEOPLE TO KNOW ABOUT ROSARIO MONETTI?

Come see me at the Methuggashack! When I am there, most likely I will be singing while making coffee! Remember that a smile is always something available for everyone. For me, it’s all about my love for life, music, and a cup of great coffee.

Visit methuggashack.com for more information.

Toms Cerarini is the executive director and founder of Convivio and also serves as the Italian honorary consul of San Diego. Convivio cultivates community and fellowship, advances Italian cultural identity, and fosters multicultural awareness across myriad disciplines through education and research, social enrichment, and innovative programming. Visit or conviviosociety.org or follow along at @conviviosociety.

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REAL Marketing Inc. has helped real estate agents build their market share and client retention for more than 28 years across North America, specializing in increasing market share and improving customer retention. We are pleased to announce our team has helped Gregg Neuman and the Neuman & Neuman Team extend their lead in Downtown sales for the NINTH consecutive year.

REAL Marketing, Inc. is a marketing company dedicated to promoting real estate agents and their businesses. Gregg Neuman is the team leader of Neuman & Neuman Real Estate, Inc. a team of more than two real estate agents working together for Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices California Properties and the data above under Gregg Neuman includes all transactions closed by the Neuman & Neuman Team. Many of the agents featured in this list are also team leaders or sole practitioners. All information above was based upon data available at the end of December 2019, for January 1 through December 31, 2019. The information is based upon data supplied by Sandicor MLS and includes all transactions reported under the agents named above. Neither Sandicor nor the MLS guarantees or is in any way responsible for its accuracy. Data maintained by Sandicor or their MLS does not reflect all real estate activities in the market. Information deemed reliable but not guaranteed. Copyright © Trendgraphix, Inc. ©2020 Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices is a member of the franchise system of BHH Affiliates LLC. DRE 01317331

**TOP AGENTS in 92101**

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**TOP 10 in 92101**

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<td>Windermere Homes &amp; Estates</td>
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